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Atari Online News, Etc.
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-* Social Network for Robots! *-
-* U.S. Shoppers Were Less Than Jolly! *-
-* The \$25 Raspberry Pi To Launch Next Month! *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Happy New Year!!

This week is typically the slowest for news in the entire year. And, for news of interest for computer users (including we as Atari fans!), you have to consider that "weakness" to be even more pronounced. As you can see from the size of this week's issue, the lack of news this week has continued to be validated!

The Hanukkah/Christmas holidays are over but the bill-paying and possible continuance of returning some unwanted/unneeded gifts. We spent a quiet day at my in-law's, exchanged some gifts, had a nice meal, relaxed a little, and returned home to spend the rest of the day with the dogs. I hope that you all had an enjoyable holiday, as well!

Well, the new year is rapidly approaching. Who knows what lies in store for us this year; it certainly was one helluva ride in 2011! The idealist in all of us will consider that things can only get better, but the realist in us forces us to believe that this premise is likely not true. However, we can still hope that things will get better!

All of us here at A-ONE want to take a moment to thank all of you, our faithful followers, for your continued support over the past year. As I've mentioned in past years, we certainly appreciate it! Please have a healthy new year; and please, start it off responsibly!

Until next time...

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Braben's \$25 Raspberry Pi To Launch Next Month

You might remember a brief blip about video game veteran David Braben and his low-cost mini-computer project named the Raspberry Pi a while back. Well, it seems like he's finally finished developing the computer and may

be ready to launch in January.

The new version is a little bigger than the USB sized prototype but is still roughly the same price, and price was arguably the main point of the project. Braben wanted to make it easy to distribute the starter computers among high school students in order to develop interest in programming at an early age.

The Raspberry Pi has now been split into two versions: One priced at \$25 and one at \$35. The 25\$, Quake 3 Arena running device is packed with the prototypes same 700MHZ ARM 11 processor, runs Linux and has the same USB and HDMI ports. The latest version has 128MB of RAM, uses an SD card and has an audio and RCA video jack. The \$35 model gets you the same specs, plus 256MB of RAM and an Ethernet port.

The boards are currently being fine-tuned - undergoing electrical, hardware and software testing. The team is shooting for January, but it should be noted that this was moved from the original hope for the end of 2011. Aside from the general January release, there is also an auction for a select few to receive a device this month.

Braben stated in an earlier demonstration of the Raspeberry Pi prototype that he wished to improve on the way high schools taught computer classes, which mainly focused on office skills. He wanted school goers to be enthusiastic about creating the products they typically consume.

U.K. Charity Preps \$25-\$35 PCs For Early 2012 Launch

A high-tech charity based in the United Kingdom is prepping two models of a credit-card-sized PC that will be available for purchase early next year for \$25 and \$35, respectively.

Among other things, the cheap price and lower power requirements of the new devices from the Raspberry Pi organization promise to make it less worrisome for parents everywhere to permit their children to tinker with the innards of a fully capable computing machine.

One major organization goal is to provide developing countries with an affordable means of deploying inexpensive computing devices in areas where the cost, power and hardware requirements of traditional desktop machines are prohibitive obstacles.

"We want to see cheap, accessible, programmable computers everywhere," the Raspberry Pi development team said.

What's more, the new Raspberry Pi machines will provide children as well as adult hobbyists with a platform for compiling and running home-grown software apps without risking the family's significantly more expensive machines.

At the outset, the tiny machine will run the ArchLinux, Debian and Fedora distributions of ARM GNU/Linux, which users will be able to purchase on preloaded SD cards sold separately.

"We want owning a truly personal computer to be normal for children," the Raspberry Pi development team said. "We think that 2012 is going to be a very exciting year."

Don't be fooled by the device's tiny footprint and low cost. Raspberry Pi is fully capable of rendering Blu-ray-quality, 1080p video playback. What's more, the machine integrates the requisite hardware-accelerated graphics capabilities for supporting imaging, a camcorder, streaming media and 3D gaming.

At the heart of the diminutive device is Broadcom's BCM2835 system on a chip, which features a standard ARM v6 core running at 700MHz. Also aboard is Broadcom's dual-core Videocore IV multimedia co-processor and Videocore graphics processor unit. Additionally, the tiny PC board integrates a RAM chip as well as an SD card slot.

With respect to connecting to peripherals, Raspberry Pi sports composite video and HDMI outputs that will enable experimenters to use either a digital or analog television as a display. Moreover, a USB port supplies the connection for a hub to which users can attach a USB keyboard, mouse and other peripherals.

Though a Wi-Fi radio is not aboard the device itself, users will be able to add wireless capabilities by plugging in a USB dongle. Additionally, the \$35 model includes a standard 10/100 wired Ethernet port.

The Raspberry Pi will initially ship without a case, though the U.K. charity expects to offer one later on. The 5-volt power supply, which connects to the board via the USB port, will be sold separately.

The Raspberry Pi is also expected to provide adult hobbyists with a basic platform for experimentation even as ARM chip architectures make forays over time through the sheer weight of the diversity of the chip ecosystems being designed today, noted Al Hilwa, director of applications software at IDC.

"As systems trend towards further miniaturization, they will inevitably grow lower in cost," Hilwa said. "It is not inconceivable to have PC functionality shift to phone CPUs as these chips ramp up in cores and gigahertz, but this scenario is at least five years away from mainstreaming."

In the meantime, Hilwa believes there will likely be a renaissance for Linux systems such as the ArchLinux, Debian and Fedora distributions of ARM GNU/Linux that will be supplied for the Raspberry Pi at the outset.

This will especially be the case "for hobbyists who will be increasingly cut out of mainstream platforms because of their tight control through app stores and restricted programming models," Hilwa said.

Social Network for Robots Lets You Talk to Your Roomba

It's possible your Roomba has more to say online than you do.

A new social network, MyRobots, hopes to be the "Facebook for robots." The network allows users to connect their robotic devices, which can then post status updates like, "The cat is in my way," or "my bin is full." Users can monitor their devices remotely and add to the capabilities of their robotics by connecting them to the site.

[More from Mashable: Facebook Status Update Saves Woman, Child in Hostage Situation]

This isn't the first time robotics fans have attempted to give their devices personality and human-like traits.

In addition to communicating with their users, robots can communicate with each other and share information in order to perform complicated tasks, says Carlos Asmat, who is coordinating the MyRobots project.

Launched on Dec. 20, 2011, MyRobots is a marketing maneuver by RobotShop.com, a website that sells personal robotics. MyRobots, however, will not be a short-lived publicity stunt and will operate like a social network for robots. This raises some ethical concerns considering the network and its features are all tied to a for-profit robotics company.

The network is off to a slow start with only 227 public robots registered. But the company points out that they have many more private robots registered on the site, as well as humans who have yet to connect their devices. Humans can also join the social network and communicate with their robots.

"The community response is growing much faster than we initially expected," Asmat says. "We are definitely happy to have so many robots in just a week of operation." Asmat said they hope MyRobots attracts a fraction of the estimated 50 billion devices that will be connected to the cloud by 2020.

The platform currently supports 17 different types of personal robotics from the Roomba vacuum to aldebaran karotz, a small robotic rabbit. Intelligent devices and hardware that connect to the internet can join MyRobots using the open source API.

In the coming weeks, the site will introduce functions such as commenting, brainstorming and social sharing. MyRobots is also working on a robot app store in their cloud and are soliciting developers to create apps. MyRobots will take a 25% transaction fee but their website says it offers developers a chance to create a brand on a platform in beta.

Currently, the service is free, but the site says it will soon start charging.

Do you think a robot social network will take off or is this a marketing ploy? Please tell us in the comments.

U.S. Shoppers Less Than Merry After Online Glitches

Tom Nenon, a philosophy professor at the University of Memphis, is vexed with his online shopping experience at Best Buy, a sentiment shared by other U.S. Internet shoppers this holiday season.

Just days before Christmas, he received an email from the top U.S. consumer electronics chain informing him that his online order for a 42" Samsung TV will not be fulfilled.

"You can count on me not being a Best Buy customer anymore," Nenon told Reuters on Friday, adding that he was disappointed that the chain tried to

make him buy an older model at the same price as a replacement, rather than trying to make amends for its shortcoming.

Best Buy is not the only retailer causing problems online this Christmas. Other brick-and-mortar chains including Target Corp, Wal-Mart Stores and Barneys are struggling to keep up with online demand, an indication of poor execution by retailers during the biggest selling season of the year.

"Since Best Buy's website has always been a stepchild to the stores, it's gotten short shrift, and when they boosted Web demand by essentially matching others' Web prices, they got a bit overwhelmed," said Craig Johnson, president of retail consulting firm Customer Growth Partners.

In an email, Best Buy spokeswoman Lisa Hawks said less than 1 percent of Best Buy customers' online orders during the Thanksgiving weekend and the following week were affected.

"The challenges related to this situation are being addressed. We are very sorry for the inconvenience this has caused, and are providing e-Gift Cards to the affected customers," Hawks said.

Other chains apologized for online ordering and fulfillment issues as well.

"We, at Barneys New York, are sincerely apologetic for any inconvenience that occurred while holiday shopping on barneys.com this past week. We are personally reaching out as quickly as possible to every customer who has been affected by this limited, but unfortunate, IT glitch," Barneys posted on Facebook. A spokeswoman for the company did not return phone messages seeking comment on the nature of the problems.

In a bid to win shoppers from the likes of Amazon.com, many brick-and-mortar chains including Best Buy decided to offer free shipping this holiday season.

The decision certainly helped sales.

U.S. shoppers spent \$30.9 billion toward online purchases during the current holiday season, a 15 percent increase from the year-ago period, according to comScore.

Still, experts think retailers bit off more than they could chew.

Target's website crashed twice in recent months, while some Wal-Mart Stores shoppers had trouble checking out online when its site went down briefly after midnight on Black Friday, the day after the U.S. Thanksgiving holiday.

"Retailers have been surprised by how successful the holiday season has been online. Negative economic sentiment may have driven more people to the Web in search of better deals," said Jordy Leiser, chief executive of STELLAService, which rates online retailer customer service.

"For some retailers, this was a good thing that turned into a very bad thing once it started affecting the experience of customers online," Leiser said.

Only six of the 25 largest U.S. retailers received top marks for online customer service, including website performance, between this year's November 25 Black Friday and the following Cyber Monday, according to

STELLAService.

The result is a large number of disappointed online shoppers like Nenon.

"They don't understand the basics of customer service," Nenon said of Best Buy. "I understand that things can happen. What bothered me is when they made a mistake, then they made no concessions to their customers to try and make up for it."

Nenon's sentiment was echoed by a director of communications at a San Francisco tech company who decided to order his Christmas tree online from Target.com this year.

The shopper, who did not want to be named, received an email from Target saying the tree would not be delivered until very close to Dec 25. To top it off, Target did not let him cancel the order, but advised him to mail the tree back once it arrived.

The tree finally arrived via FedEx on December 21, but that was not the end of his worries.

"As predicted, FedEx dropped it off without knocking. So I had the added joy of getting the FedEx guy to come back and get it. And let me tell you, nothing screams holiday cheer like watching a grumbling FedEx employee schlepping a Christmas tree back into his truck," he told Reuters.

The stories are bad news for retailers, industry-watchers said.

"The three pillars of retail are prices, product and experience. Best Buy sells a commodity product and has to price competitively, so the thing most in their control was experience. And now they've blown that.

"It's another blemish for a management team that is starting to look like they've gone five rounds with Rocky Balboa ... and lost," Trutina Financial Chief Investment Officer Patty Edwards said.

"People have a long memory. And when a retailer ruins Christmas by not delivering little Jimmy's present on time, they've placed themselves on the permanent 'naughty' list."

Google Beats Facebook and Yahoo! as The Top US Web Brand in 2011

Google was the most visited US web brand in 2011, defeating social networking site Facebook and rival internet giants Yahoo! and Microsoft to gain the top spot.

An average of 153.4 million people in the US visited Google sites per month in the US from January to October, making it the leading internet brand in the country, said market researcher Nielsen in its end-of-year recap.

Facebook ranked second with an average of 137.6 million visitors per month, narrowly beating Yahoo!, which saw an average of 130.1 million visitors to its sites each month.

Recently released statistics from data intelligence company Experian Hitwise found Facebook to be both the most searched for term and the most

visited website in 2011. According to Experian Hitwise www.facebook.com accounted for 10.29% of all US visits from January to November 2011, while www.google.com ranked second and accounted for 7.70% of all US visits.

Facebook also held an overwhelming lead over other competitors in the category of top US Social Networks & Blogs according to Nielsen, drawing more than three times the number of monthly visitors than its closest challenger, Google's blogging platform Blogger, which saw an average of 45.7 million visitors per month.

Microblogging site Twitter.com ranked third with 23.6 million unique visitors and was followed by blogging platform WordPress.com (20.4 million visitors), aging social music network Myspace.com (17.9 million visitors), business-focused social network LinkedIn (17.0 million visitors) and blogging platform Tumblr (10.9 million visitors).

Reports that Google's newly launched social network, Google+, was dying in the months after it launched due to a lack of visitors to the network proved to be untrue. The social network managed to climb into eighth place on the list with an average of 8.2 million visitors per month, narrowly beating Yahoo!'s (discontinued as of December 1) social networking aggregation service Yahoo! Pulse (8.0 million visitors) and Six Apart's blogging service TypePad (7.8 million visitors).

Top US web brands in 2011:

- Google
- Facebook
- Yahoo!
- MSN/WindowsLive/Bing
- YouTube
- Microsoft
- AOL Media Network
- Wikipedia
- Apple
- Ask Search Network

Top 10 U.S. social networks & blogs

- Facebook
- Blogger
- Twitter.com
- WordPress.com
- Myspace.com
- LinkedIn
- Tumblr
- Google+
- Yahoo! Pulse
- Six Apart TypePad

Facebook Used by More Than Half The Population in Some Countries

Social networking site Facebook has grown to become the biggest social networking site in the world with more than 800 million active users, but just how popular is it with users living around the globe?

"Facebook currently has more than 800 million active users. With a world population having just passed the 7 billion barrier, that would mean that around 11% of people on Earth are on Facebook," said market analyst firm Pingdom in a December 28 post on its Royal Pingdom blog, but added that "[t]hat is of course not necessarily true, as there are organizations and businesses that have Facebook accounts, and some individuals may have more than one, but it is a staggering number nonetheless."

The US is often reported as having the largest number of Facebook users in the world; however, it also has a much bigger population than many other Facebook-using countries.

Pingdom set out to discover how popular the social network was in countries with a population of more than 500,000 by comparing a country's population with the number of reported Facebook users in the region.

"We took SocialBaker's data on how many Facebook users there are in countries around the world, data on Internet users from the World Bank, and population data from Wikipedia," said Pingdom.

According to the figures Facebook is most popular in Cyprus, where 69% of the entire country is hooked on Facebook.

Hong Kong is second with 53 percent of the population and is followed by Chile (52%), Singapore (51%), Norway (51%), Denmark (51%), the United States (50%), Canada (49%), the UK (49%) and Sweden (48%).

Market researcher comScore found that Facebook was still the most popular social network in the US with 166 million unique visitors in November in a report published in December. Twitter was second with 35.4 million unique visitors, and business-focused social network LinkedIn ranked third with 35 million unique visitors for November.

ComScore said the average user spent around 6.6 hours per month on Facebook, an increase of 37% from the year before.

Twitter Index: Microbloggers Celebrate The Last Friday of 2011

People on microblogging site Twitter are celebrating the last Friday of 2011 and talking about their plans for the New Year.

"Rebecca Black don't be sad, there are many more Friday's in 2012," joke Tweeps, making fun of one of 2011's most celebrated memes.

Microbloggers are listing their favorite "crushes" in 2011 with the first place hashtag, '#mycrushof2011.' Not surprisingly Twitter favorites Justin Bieber and boyband One Direction are on many people's lists. Twitterers are also using third place hashtag '#iWantARelationship' to let their followers know that they would like to be in a relationship in 2012 (provided that certain conditions are met).

'Yo Momma' jokes are spiraling out of control on the social network as people scramble to out-tweet each other. The most popular 'Yo Momma' joke circling the blog is, 'Yo momma so fat when she sat on an iPhone.. it turned into an iPad.'

A photo of former NBA player Charles Barkley purportedly starring in the fictional sequel of the film Precious has gone viral on Twitter along with the term 'Precious 2.'

Twitterers tweet that they are 'Watching [the movie] Obsessed,' the American comedy 'House Party,' the animated TV series 'Family Guy,' and the American reality TV show 'Mob Wives.'

The top 10 most talked about topics on Twitter on December 30 at 7:30 AM GMT are:

- #mycrushof2011 (new)
- #lastfridayof2011 (new)
- #iWantARelationship (new)
- We Are Blessed To Have Jonas (new)
- Precious 2 (new)
- Watching Obsessed (new)
- House Party (new)
- Yo Momma (new)
- Family Guy (new)
- Mob Wives (new)

Stanford Archives Offer Window into Apple Origins

In the interview, Steve Wozniak and the late Steve Jobs recall a seminal moment in Silicon Valley history - how they named their upstart computer company some 35 years ago.

"I remember driving down Highway 85," Wozniak says. "We're on the freeway, and Steve mentions, 'I've got a name: Apple Computer.' We kept thinking of other alternatives to that name, and we couldn't think of anything better."

Adds Jobs: "And also remember that I worked at Atari, and it got us ahead of Atari in the phonebook."

The interview, recorded for an in-house video for company employees in the mid-1980s, was among a storehouse of materials Apple had been collecting for a company museum. But in 1997, soon after Jobs returned to the company, Apple officials contacted Stanford University and offered to donate the collection to the school's Silicon Valley Archives.

Within a few days, Stanford curators were at Apple headquarters in nearby Cupertino, packing two moving trucks full of documents, books, software, videotapes and marketing materials that now make up the core of Stanford's Apple Collection.

The collection, the largest assembly of Apple historical materials, can help historians, entrepreneurs and policymakers understand how a startup launched in a Silicon Valley garage became a global technology giant.

"Through this one collection you can trace out the evolution of the personal computer," said Stanford historian Leslie Berlin. "These sorts of documents are as close as you get to the unmediated story of what really happened."

The collection is stored in hundreds of boxes taking up more than 600

feet of shelf space at the Stanford's off-campus storage facility. The Associated Press visited the climate-controlled warehouse on the outskirts of the San Francisco Bay area, but agreed not to disclose its location.

Interest in Apple and its founder has grown dramatically since Jobs died in October at age 56, just weeks after he stepped down as CEO and handed the reins to Tim Cook. Jobs' death sparked an international outpouring and marked the end of an era for Apple and Silicon Valley.

"Apple as a company is in a very, very select group," said Stanford curator Henry Lowood. "It survived through multiple generations of technology. To the credit of Steve Jobs, it meant reinventing the company at several points."

Apple scrapped its own plans for a corporate museum after Jobs returned as CEO and began restructuring the financially struggling firm, Lowood said.

Job's return, more than a decade after he was forced out of the company he co-founded, marked the beginning of one of the great comebacks in business history. It led to a long string of blockbuster products - including the iPod, iPhone and iPad - that have made Apple one of the world's most profitable brands.

After Stanford received the Apple donation, former company executives, early employees, business partners and Mac enthusiasts have come forward and added their own items to the archives.

The collection includes early photos of young Jobs and Wozniak, blueprints for the first Apple computer, user manuals, magazine ads, TV commercials, company t-shirts and drafts of Jobs' speeches.

In one company video, Wozniak talks about how he had always wanted his own computer, but couldn't get his hands on one at a time when few computers were found outside corporations or government agencies.

"All of a sudden I realized, 'Hey microprocessors all of a sudden are affordable. I can actually build my own,'" Wozniak says. "And Steve went a little further. He saw it as a product you could actually deliver, sell and someone else could use."

The pair also talk about the company's first product, the Apple I computer, which went on sale in July 1976 for \$666.66.

"Remember an Apple I was not particularly useable for too much, but it was so incredible to have your own computer," Jobs says. "It was kind of an embarkation point from the way computers had been going in these big steel boxes with switches and lights."

Among the other items in the Apple Collection:

- * Thousands of photos by photographer Douglas Menuez, who documented Jobs' years at NeXT Computer, which he founded in 1985 after he was pushed out of Apple.

- * A company video spoofing the 1984 movie "Ghost Busters," with Jobs and other executives playing "Blue Busters," a reference to rival IBM.

- * Handwritten financial records showing early sales of Apple II, one of

the first mass-market computers.

* An April 1976 agreement for a \$5,000 loan to Apple Computer and its three co-founders: Jobs, Wozniak and Ronald Wayne, who pulled out of the company less than two weeks after its founding.

* A 1976 letter written by a printer who had just met Jobs and Wozniak and warns his colleagues about the young entrepreneurs: "This joker (Jobs) is going to be calling you ... They are two guys, they build kits, operate out of a garage."

The archive shows the Apple founders were far ahead of their time, Lowood said.

"What they were doing was spectacularly new," he said. "The idea of building computers out of your garage and marketing them and thereby creating a successful business - it just didn't compute for a lot of people."

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